

The president had difficulty in cutting public-sector employment and reducing the fiscal deficit because of resistance among many different segments of the government. Honduras still depends on a few traditional commodities for most of its export revenue, although the percentage of nontraditional exports has been rising in recent years (see Table 7). In 1993, an election year, the government spent heavily to boost economic growth. That spending was unsustainable, however, as a severe drought and rising energy costs caused a steep decline in economic growth in 1994, leaving the government near bankruptcy.⁴¹ As a recent study on Honduras put it, "the economy had operated so long on an ad hoc basis that it lacked the tools to implement coherent economic objectives. Solving the most immediate crisis frequently took precedence over long-term goals."⁴²

ROLE OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN HONDURAS'S DEVELOPMENT

Like Costa Rica, Honduras has received most of its foreign assistance in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴³ The United States made its largest contributions during that time (see Figure 7). The Reagan Administration had identified an important U.S. security interest in supporting the Honduran government during a time of considerable political turmoil in the rest of Central America. Thus, in the 1980s, U.S. aid was given for two reasons: to promote development and to support U.S. foreign policy interests.

If one were to judge the efficacy of aid in supporting U.S. national interests, one would probably conclude that it was a clear success. Honduras reliably supported U.S. political and military initiatives in the area, especially the U.S. Administration's effort to topple the Sandinista Nicaraguan government through support of the contra rebels. Honduras remained firmly allied with the United States and generally avoided the civil conflict experienced by El Salvador and Guatemala. Finally, Honduras provided bases for U.S. military training and exercises during the 1980s.

The role of foreign assistance in promoting development, however, shows mixed results, in part because of the political objectives of the U.S. aid. Foreign assistance—U.S. money in particular—probably did the most good for health,

41. Agency for International Development, *Congressional Presentation: Fiscal Year 1996* (February 24, 1995), p. 608.

42. Merrill, *Honduras: A Country Study*, p. 114.

43. This section is based largely on background papers that were prepared for CBO by AID's mission in Honduras.

TABLE 7. COMPOSITION OF HONDURAS'S EXPORTS, 1980-1994 (In percent)

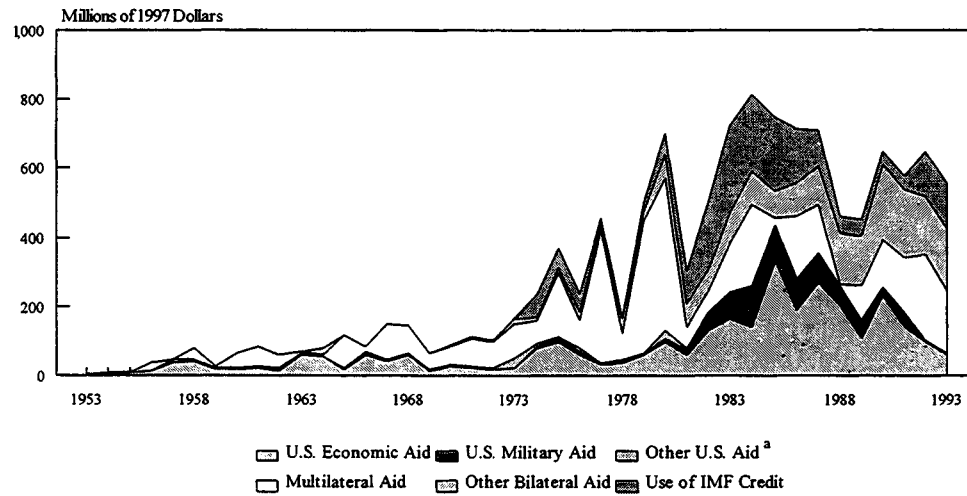
| Type and Destination | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1994 |
|---|------|------|------|------|
| Traditional (To all countries) ^a | 75 | 80 | 86 | 67 |
| Nontraditional | | | | |
| To CACM countries | 10 | 3 | 0.3 | 5 |
| To all other countries | 15 | 17 | 11 | 28 |

SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Agency for International Development.

NOTE: CACM = Central American Common Market.

a. Mostly bananas and coffee but also wood, beef, lead, zinc, silver, shrimp, lobster, sugar, and tobacco.

FIGURE 7. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO HONDURAS, 1953-1993



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Agency for International Development, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

a. Mostly loans from the Export-Import Bank.

education, and population. Assistance used to promote economic growth performed less well.

Health

Honduras has seen dramatic improvement in its infant mortality rates over the past 20 years.⁴⁴ In 1967, there were 119 deaths per thousand; by 1992, that figure had declined to 43. Other indicators are equally suggestive. Low weight-for-age malnutrition in children under two years of age declined from 30 percent in 1987 to 24 percent in 1994. Polio has been eradicated. Diarrhea is now the third leading cause of death in children under five years, whereas in 1987 it was the leading cause.

Foreign aid donors have played an important part in the health sector. The United States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank devoted about 10 percent of their aid to the health sector. The number of donors in that sector has been high, especially since Honduras's return to democratic government in 1982. Those donors have included the United States, Switzerland, France, Japan, the Pan American Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Foreign aid donors have undertaken a variety of activities to improve health conditions in Honduras and expanded health access, especially among the rural poor. For example, AID sponsored the construction of rural water and sanitation systems, immunization programs, oral rehydration therapy to prevent death from diarrhea, and programs to strengthen the institutional capacity of the government of Honduras to sustain and expand health programs.

According to AID, the results of those activities are clear and measurable. AID's water and sanitation programs have served approximately 30 percent of the rural population. They have built 1,213 water systems, 2,942 wells with hand pumps, and 179,854 latrines serving 746,000 people. Although it is one of the hemisphere's poorest nations, Honduras has one of the highest immunization rates in Latin America.

44. This section relies heavily on Thomas Bossert and others, *The Sustainability of U.S.-Supported Health, Population, and Nutrition Programs in Honduras: 1942-1986*, AID Evaluation Special Study No. 58 (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, December 1988).

Education

According to AID, the role of foreign assistance in improving literacy rates and expanding access to education in Honduras is an almost unqualified success. Literacy jumped from 57 percent in 1967 to 73 percent in 1992. Most of that improvement reflected better education in the earliest grades, where AID has concentrated its resources. AID was the largest donor in the education sector. Thus, to the extent that foreign assistance is responsible for those dramatic changes, U.S. assistance deserves the lion's share of the credit for those accomplishments.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the highest priority of AID's program was to expand access to education. Since 1986, the agency has also focused on improving the efficiency and quality of education. Honduras had a national curriculum, but AID helped to develop clearly defined learning objectives, a standardized testing system, and educational materials.

U.S. spending on education emphasized a variety of activities to achieve those goals. AID helped build and reconstruct 5,800 primary school classrooms. The agency's Primary Education Efficiency Project established learning standards and tests to measure student achievement in each subject area and grade level. It also developed student-centered textbooks, workbooks, and other materials for each subject and grade level. AID then printed over 17 million copies of those materials for the six grades of primary school and trained over 25,000 teachers annually on how to use them.

The Honduran government was especially committed to working with AID and improving education levels. In 1982, Honduras spent 3.8 percent of its GDP on education; by 1987, that figure had increased to 4.9 percent—a high figure among Central American countries. In 1995, education spending accounted for 25 percent of government expenditures.

In addition to the improvement in literacy, related indicators have strengthened. Between 1986 and 1994, dropout rates declined by 55 percent and repetition rates fell by 20 percent. Aggregate test scores for grades 1 through 6 increased by 229 percent between 1990 and 1995.

Population Growth

A consistent, recurring problem for Honduras has been its growing population, especially among the rural poor.⁴⁵ Although Honduras's aggregate GNP has continued to grow—even through the 1980s and 1990s—GNP per capita in 1993 was no higher than it had been in 1978. Over the past 35 years, GNP per capita barely grew as aggregate population nearly tripled. AID began supporting family planning activities in Honduras in 1965.

Family planning and population control programs did not always receive high-level support from the government or other prominent segments of Honduran society. Thus, the record of foreign assistance for population-related activities is understandably mixed. AID's major effort has been to expand the use of contraceptives—a program that has had some success. The percentage of women of reproductive age using contraceptive methods rose from 12 percent in 1976 to 47 percent in 1993. An AID evaluation team reports that roughly 60 percent to 70 percent of that improvement is attributable to AID's assistance. The fertility rate has declined from 7.4 births per woman in 1967 to 4.9 in 1992. But given the rate of contraceptive use, AID believes that the fertility rate should be lower.

Agriculture

Some critics have charged that U.S. food assistance to Honduras, particularly the P.L. 480 Title I program, has done more harm than good to the country's ability to produce its own food. As of the early 1980s, Honduras was no longer self-sufficient and had to import basic foodstuffs each year.

Basic grain production has not kept pace with population growth for some time. The P.L. 480 loans gave the Honduran government surplus grains that it then sold in the home market. That influx of relatively cheap foodstuffs over a long period of time created disincentives for local farmers to produce basic grains, including corn, which has been a traditional staple of the Honduran diet. That dependency on foodstuffs grown outside Honduras might not be an issue if the economy was not also facing other problems. For example, rural subsistence farmers who used to produce basic grains have few other employment opportunities.

That view of Honduran agriculture and the role of foreign aid, however, does not tell the entire story. In the view of some experts, including AID, the unfavorable policy environment was causing more damage to small farmers and agricultural

45. Richard Martin and others, *AID's Family Planning Program in Honduras*, AID Technical Report No. 9 (Washington, D.C.: Agency for International Development, June 1993).

prices than P.L. 480 aid. Throughout the 1980s, as was mentioned above, the exchange rate in Honduras was overvalued, making imports (including food) cheaper than domestic products. Indeed, the overvalued exchange rate made P.L. 480 wheat seem particularly cheap. When the government began reforming the economy in earnest in the 1990s, including devaluing the exchange rate, the slide in agricultural production stopped and began to reverse. Those reforms were undertaken in part with U.S. assistance.

In addition, “self-sufficiency” may be less important than “self-reliance”; that is, providing adequate food for Honduras’s population may depend more on generating economic growth and producing high-value products to enable Honduras to pay for any food imports it may need. Consequently, AID has focused on increasing exports of nontraditional products, such as melons and Chinese vegetables, and has had some success in recent years. Exports of nontraditional products to non-CACM countries more than doubled between 1990 and 1994 (see Table 7). In 1994, Honduras exported \$180 million in nontraditional agricultural products and imported only \$81 million in basic foodstuffs such as corn, rice, wheat, and beans. And Honduras is currently running a large surplus in agricultural trade. AID hopes that by helping small, poor farmers produce nontraditional agricultural products and bring them to market, they will increase their income and, consequently, their calorie consumption and overall welfare. Other AID efforts have included helping reform land rental laws so that small farmers may rent out their land or rent additional land and perhaps move beyond subsistence agriculture.

Economic Growth

Before 1980, the major bilateral and multilateral donors to Honduras did not focus much of their aid on reforming economic and trade policies. Multilateral donors, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, extended loans and credit for building infrastructure and reforming economic policies. The role and impact of multilateral aid for infrastructure on Honduras’s economic and social development has not been systematically evaluated. More information is available on the role of U.S. assistance during the 1980s and 1990s. Overall, since 1953 the United States, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the World Bank have devoted over 58 percent of their assistance to promoting general economic growth and development, but the major portion of that amount has been given since 1980.

Paralleling the programs in Costa Rica, the United States provided only technical assistance to Honduras in the 1950s and supported the CACM strategy in the 1960s. In the 1970s, AID shifted its focus to poverty and basic needs programs. Some of the multilateral organizations and AID encouraged the Honduran government’s efforts at state-centered development. Those organizations promoted

the creation of the various state and semiautonomous institutions to manage the economy. Later, many of those state-run enterprises—suffering from corruption, inefficiency, and high debt—were closed, and the central government was forced to assume their debt burdens. There is little evidence to suggest that Honduras gained any material benefit from those experiments.⁴⁶

With the onset of Honduras's economic crisis in the early 1980s, the United States and the multilateral organizations focused more of their efforts on supporting the economy and promoting policy reform. AID, along with the International Monetary Fund, initially thought that Honduras merely needed some short-term balance-of-payments support for stabilization in an economic downturn. In 1982 and 1983, the IMF and AID sought to impose fiscal and monetary discipline—a structural adjustment program—as a condition of assistance that took the form of cash transfers. But Honduras proved reluctant to carry through with the required austerity program, and the IMF and AID suspended their program in late 1983.⁴⁷

Despite the unwillingness of the Honduran government and society to undertake the required reforms and austerity measures, AID resumed cash disbursements shortly after suspending them. The United States apparently placed a higher priority than other donors on maintaining the cooperation of the Honduran government in the broader East-West conflict that was taking place in Central America.⁴⁸

The political importance of Honduras to the U.S. administration reduced the leverage AID had in forcing policy reforms. Thus, aid money in 1983 and 1984, from a developmental perspective, was largely unproductive. Still, AID argues that it managed to persuade the Honduran government to make some changes through quiet policy dialogue rather than overt conditionality. In 1985, the agency attempted to withhold some funding pending changes to tariff law, but aid was resumed in 1986 to signal political support of a newly elected government.

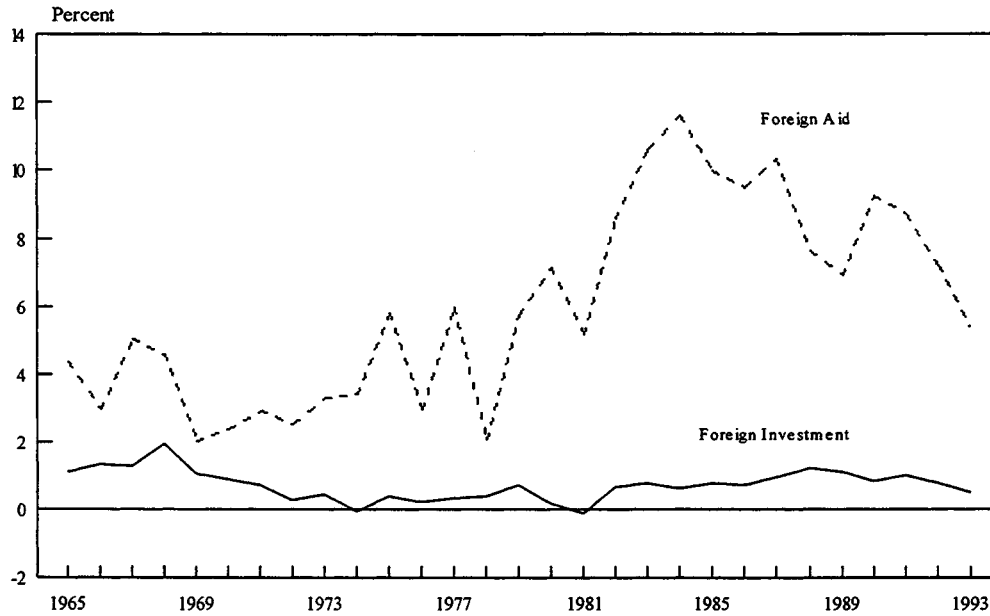
The economy did not improve very much in the late 1980s. Government deficits at that time were financed by large infusions of foreign aid, which was far more important to the economy than foreign investment (see Figure 8). AID continued its cash transfers to Honduras through 1989 but then suspended that aid to signal its displeasure with the outgoing government for failing to carry out reforms.

46. Norsworthy and Barry, *Inside Honduras*, p. 53.

47. Agency for International Development, *The Effectiveness and Economic Development Impact of Policy-Based Cash Transfer Programs: The Case of Honduras*, AID Evaluation Highlights No. 3 (May 1989), p. 2.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

FIGURE 8. FOREIGN AID AND FOREIGN INVESTMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HONDURAS'S GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, 1965-1993



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Agency for International Development and the World Bank.

The dire economic situation in Honduras and the end of the Cold War—and, hence, the end of Honduras's political leverage—seemed to convince the incoming government of President Callejas to make some reforms. AID resumed support of the Honduran government. In particular, the United States helped the government clear its arrearage with the multilateral financial institutions, and aid flows from those organizations resumed in 1990. But when Callejas allowed the fiscal deficit to grow in an effort to secure reelection for his party, many of his gains were undone. The United States held up disbursement of economic support funds in 1993 until the newly elected administration came to grips with the fiscal problems it inherited. Although the problems have been dealt with and the Honduran economy shows some encouraging signs of growth, that progress could once again unravel.

Some critics of foreign aid to Honduras have charged that it has left the country worse off. AID and the multilateral institutions have not used their resources to address the structural problems of the Honduran economy, such as the wide divide between rich and poor caused mainly by the concentration of land among a small percentage of the population. The gap between rich and poor has grown in the 1990s. Furthermore, waste and corruption of aid dollars is widespread. Jaime Rosenthal, former vice president under President Azcona, charged that up to 30 percent of U.S. aid may have been lost to corruption and up to 50 percent went to business elites rather than into programs that would have improved the living standards of the poor. Nor has AID used its leverage to persuade the government to adopt development strategies and programs to meet the basic health, educational, and income needs of the country's rural, poor majority.⁴⁹

Furthermore, those critics argue, the Honduran economy and society have become largely dependent on aid money. Most important organizations and officials appear to receive U.S. money. Recipients include political parties, judges, military/civic-action teams, business associations and business executives themselves, journalists, unions, development groups, charitable organizations, churches, cattle ranchers, and government ministries and ministers. Structurally, the economy does not appear to be able to break the dependency on foreign aid for continued economic growth. In addition, critics charge that because of its wide involvement in Honduran society and economy, AID has created a "shadow" government, setting up or funding institutions that carry out functions that properly belong to the Honduran government, thereby weakening the effectiveness of that government.⁵⁰

49. Norsworthy and Barry, *Inside Honduras*, p. 164. Susan C. Stonich discusses some of the negative consequences of promoting nontraditional exports in Honduras in "The Promotion of Non-traditional Agricultural Exports in Honduras: Issues of Equity, Environment and Natural Resource Management," *Development and Change*, vol. 22 (1991), pp. 725-755.

50. Norsworthy and Barry, *Inside Honduras*, p. 165.

CONCLUSION

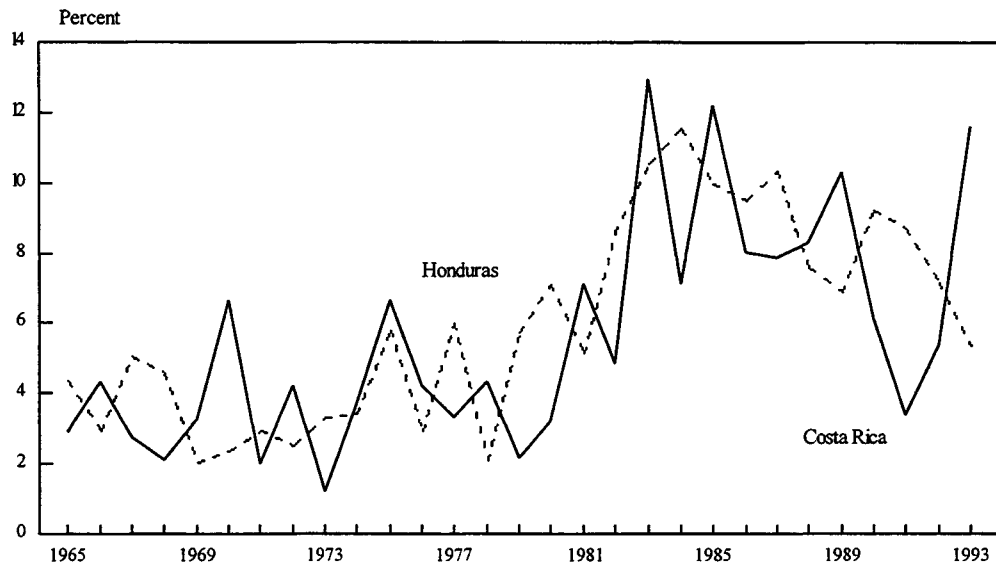
In comparing the development histories of Costa Rica and Honduras, several factors stand out. First, investment in human capital was particularly important in Costa Rica's progress, and the relative lack of investment in Honduras probably inhibited its progress. Costa Rica's better-educated and healthier population seemed more willing and certainly more capable of starting new businesses and making them work in an international economic environment that was constantly changing. Honduras's mostly poor and rural population simply do not have the means to improve their plight. The government of Costa Rica, reflecting its long democratic tradition, made the commitment to growth with equity. That did not happen in Honduras.

Second, the stability of Costa Rica's political system stands in contrast to the instability in Honduras. Power was transferred every four years by election in Costa Rica, whereas Honduras endured a number of unelected military governments. Rights and property were protected in Costa Rica by its well-developed judicial system. And having abolished its army, Costa Rica was certainly able to devote more resources to activities that had a beneficial impact on development than did Honduras, whose military demanded a significant percentage of national resources.

Third, foreign aid most often seemed to reinforce the prevailing political and economic policies pursued by the respective governments. In the 1970s, foreign aid was given to both Costa Rica and Honduras while they pursued the counterproductive macroeconomic policies that contributed to the severity of the economic crisis in the early 1980s. In contrast, Costa Rica's commitment to change those and other policies in the 1980s made the application of foreign aid useful in its reform program. Costa Rica may very well have reformed in any event, but foreign aid played a mostly positive role in minimizing the hardships that come with structural adjustment. In Honduras, however, the political commitment to reform was not as high. Aid money stimulated some temporary consumption-driven growth, but no permanent development followed—even though Honduras has received assistance comparable with that of Costa Rica as a percentage of their respective economies (see Figure 9).

Finally, there is little basis to distinguish between bilateral aid and multilateral aid. Both bilateral institutions, such as AID, and the multilateral World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank provided aid during the massive and counterproductive expansion of the state in the economies of Costa Rica and Honduras in the 1970s. Both types of organizations provided aid for structural adjustment programs and policy reform in the 1980s.

FIGURE 9. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE TO COSTA RICA AND HONDURAS AS A PERCENTAGE OF GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, 1965-1993



SOURCE: Congressional Budget Office based on data from the Agency for International Development and the World Bank.

NOTE: Excludes the use of credit from the International Monetary Fund.

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